

THIS MONTH

According to Intel's website, Viiv is a "new platform designed for the enjoyment of digital entertainment". In case you were as confused as we were on reading that, we've got the first Viiv PC, Dell's Dimension 5150c (right).

Our review and FAQ tells you everything you need to know about Viiv, as well as showing you how the first PC performs. We've also got a Media Center PC labs on page 90, so you can see what non-Viiv can offer you, too.

If the excitement of a new platform isn't enough for you, then why not turn to our Components section on page 42? We've got a review of ATI's nVidia-beating X1900XT graphics card. I don't want to spoil anything, but this is the fastest graphics card we have ever seen. It ripped through our benchmarks and had our whole Labs team staring at the test machine in disbelief.

Throw in a healthy selection of other products and I'm sure you'll agree that this is an excellent introduction to the new-look *Shopper*.

David Ludlow
Reviews Editor

david@computershopper.co.uk



DELL

Dimension 5150c

★★★★★

£1,079 inc VAT

After its notebook success with the Centrino standard, Intel is turning its hand to entertainment with its Viiv platform. This is designed to deliver cool, quiet, but powerful desktop PCs; see our FAQ on the opposite page for more details. Dell's Dimension 5150c is the first Viiv PC we've seen.

This PC is an attractive and compact computer, comparable in size to an Xbox. Despite its small size, the Dimension is no lightweight. The dual-core Pentium D 820 processor, backed up by 1GB of RAM, stormed through our tests. It made particularly light work of our video-encoding test. Anyone interested in fast desktop applications and multi-tasking will be more than happy.

However, gamers are going to be sorely disappointed. The onboard graphics make this PC very slow for all games. There's a free PCI-E x16 graphics card slot, but you can only fit a half-height card into it, which severely limits your choices.

One of the key goals of Viiv is to help produce small, quiet PCs. While the 5150c isn't as quiet as Gladiator's Retarius Extreme GTX (see page 13), it's better than most PCs we've seen. Dell's decision to use a BTX design helps keep the Dimension quiet, as the PC



▲ Sky by broadband is available to Viiv owners

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Dell Dimension 5150c	★★★★★	Dell Axim X51v 624MHz	★★★★★	AOC LM2028	★★★★★	Epson Perfection 2580 Photo	★★★★★
Gladiator Retarius Extreme GTX	★★★★★	Navicore Personal for Symbian Series 60	★★★★★	Asus PW191	★★★★★	FujiFilm FinePix F11 Zoom	★★★★★
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Rock Xtreme CT 2.0GHz	★★★★★	HP Photosmart 3210	★★★★★				
		HP Photosmart 8250	★★★★★				
		Kyocera Mita FS-1920n	★★★★★				
		Lexmark T640n	★★★★★				
		Lexmark X8350	★★★★★				
		Samsung ML-2250	★★★★★				



needs only a single fan at the front of the case to keep the processor and motherboard cool; however, it still gets noisy when dealing with strenuous tasks.

The Dimension 5150c ships with Windows XP Media Center Edition. While there's no remote control or TV tuner provided, it's not hard to upgrade to these items at a later date. In the meantime, Media Center provides an excellent way of organising your photos and videos. You can even subscribe to Sky by broadband and download movies legally.

Watching movies on this PC is a pleasurable experience, thanks to the huge 20" Dell widescreen flat panel. With its high native resolution of 1,680x1,050, you can also use it work on two documents side by side. Colours are rich and bright, though there was a little banding in our greyscale transitions test.

The 5150c comes with a handy four-port USB hub as well as S-video and composite sockets. While the LCD has D-sub and DVI ports, the 5150c has only D-sub. Getting a

sharp image from the LCD requires adjusting the settings in the monitor's onscreen menus; with DVI, this would have occurred automatically.

The 250GB hard disk should be sufficient for most people. Any additional hard disks will have to be external models due to the Dimension's small size. The 8X DVD writer may be frustrating if you burn a lot of DVDs; see our *Labs* on page 99 for more on external DVD

writers. Useful extras include a memory card reader and two FireWire sockets.

Microsoft Works is bundled for more serious work, but it is version 7 instead of the current 8.5. The attractive-looking speakers are adequate for listening to MP3s, but gamers and audio enthusiasts may be left wanting.

Although this PC is not suitable for gaming and it lacks DVI, the powerful Windows performance and panoramic LCD make the Dimension 5150c great value, and an interesting introduction to Viiv.

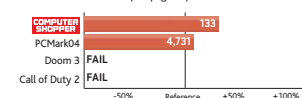
Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ☒ Compact and attractive design
- ☒ Powerful in Windows
- ☒ Unsuitable for gaming

DESKTOP PC 2.8GHz Intel Pentium D 820, 1GB RAM, 250GB hard disk, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, Intel integrated graphics, 20" LCD
E-VALUE CODE PPUK5-D025C7r2
SUPPLIER www.euro.dell.com
DETAILS www.euro.dell.com

PERFORMANCE (see page 60)



PC SYSTEMS

FAQ

Q What is Intel's Viiv?

A Viiv is like Centrino for the desktop and is Intel's platform for digital entertainment. Manufacturers sticking to the Viiv design will be able to create powerful, small PCs. The current platform states that Viiv PCs should use an Intel 945, 955 or 975 chipset, and a Pentium D, Core Duo or Extreme Edition processor, and have onboard Intel LAN.

Viiv PCs also have to be installed with Microsoft's Windows XP Media Center Edition for managing audio and video files. With support from Intel, Media Center will also be used for new music and video download services, so you can have content on demand.

For the full low-down on Viiv, you can visit Intel's website at www.intel.com/products/viiv.

Alan Lu
PC systems and storage expert

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Video page 34

Kworld DVB-T 300U	★
Neuros MPEG4 Video Recorder	★★
Panasonic NV-GS17B	★★★★★
Panasonic NV-GS150EB	★★★★★
Pinnacle ShowCenter 200	★★★★★
Terratec Cinergy hybrid T USB XS	★★★★

Audio page 36

Acoustic Energy Internet Radio	★★★
Creative Gigaworks G500	★★★★★
Creative Sound Blaster X-Fi XtremeMusic	★★★★★
IRiver U10 1GB	★★★★★
Logitech X-230	★★★★★
Sennheiser PXC 250	★★★★★
Slim Devices Squeezebox 3	★★★★★
Toshiba Gigabeat F20	★★★★★

Networks & Storage page 38

Buffalo AirStation G54 High Power	★★★★★
D-Link DSL-G624M	★★★
Linksys Cordless Internet Telephony Kit	★★★
Linksys Wireless-G Broadband Router	★★★★
Memorex Mini TravelDrive U3 512MB	★★★★★
Samsung SpinPoint SP2504C	★★★★★
TRENDnet 108Mbps 802.11g MIMO Wireless Router	★★
US Robotics Wireless MaxG Router	★★★★★
Western Digital Passport 80GB	★★★★★

Components page 42

AMD Athlon 64 3200+	★★★★★
Antec P150	★★★★★
ATI All-in-Wonder 2006 Edition	★★★
ATI All-in-Wonder X1800XL	★★★★★
ATI All-in-Wonder X1900	★★★★★
ECS KN1 SLI Extreme	★★★★★
Enemmax Liberty ELT500AWT	★★★★★
GeCube X1600Pro	★★★★★
Gigabyte GA-G1975X	★★★
Intel Pentium 4 640	★★★★★
PowerColor Radeon X1900XT	★★★★

Software & Games page 47

3am Labs LogMeIn	★★★★★
Ableton Live 5	★★★★★
Adobe Photoshop Elements 4.0	★★★★★
Avanquest RadioTracker Premium	★★★★★
CorelDraw X3 Graphics Suite	★★★★★
Corel WordPerfect Office X3 Standard	★★★
Creature Conflict: The Clan Wars	★★★★★
Fasthosts Goodlink Mobile Email	★★★★★
LapBack 2.0	★★★★★
Macromedia Dreamweaver 8	★★★★★
Mozilla Firefox 1.0	★★★★★
Magix Movie Edit Pro 10 Plus	★★★
McAfee Wireless Home Network Security 2006	★★★★★
Microsoft Works Suite 2006	★★★★★
Mozilla Firefox 1.0	★★★★★
The Movies	★★★★★
Myst V: End of Ages	★★★
Serif PagePlus 11	★★★★★
Sony Vegas Movie Studio +DVD Platinum Edition 6	★★★★★
Steganos Internet Security 2006	★★★★★
Symantec Norton Ghost 10	★★★★★
Symantec Norton SystemWorks 2006	★★★★★
TOCA Race Driver 3	★★★★★
Website Pros NetObjects Fusion 9	★★★

BYTE SIZE

GENIUS Ergo 300

★★★★★
£15 inc VAT



Most portable optical mice aimed at laptop users tend to be so tiny as to be uncomfortable for anything other than occasional use. Although it's still a bit small for anyone with large hands, the Ergo 300, available in metallic red or silver, is more comfortable than most. It has a slight hump, which helps the mouse feel more snug, although it's suitable only for right-handed people.

There are two main buttons and a clickable scroll wheel, which can scroll horizontally as well as vertically.

The Ergo 300's comfort and small size make it a great choice if you can't stand using a track pad.

Alan Lu

SUPPLIER www.techfever.co.uk
DETAILS www.geniusnet.co.uk



INTEGRAL 256MB Splash Drive

★★★★★
£29 inc VAT

USB flash disks are sturdy, but the rubber-encased Splash Drive claims to be shock-resistant and splash-proof, so it should be even more robust.

To test these claims, we dunked the Splash Drive into a cup of cold water, dropped it, and generally treated it with a lack of care. Despite our clumsiness, the data on the Splash Drive remained intact. We also liked the chain, which keeps the cap attached to the drive so it doesn't get lost.

While tough, the 256MB Splash Drive costs the same as a standard 512MB flash disk. But if you are a butter-fingers, the Splash Drive may be a wise investment.

Alan Lu

SUPPLIER www.macwarehouse.co.uk
DETAILS www.integralmemory.com

MESH Titan X1900

★★★★★
£1,572 inc VAT

Playing the latest games often demands the latest hardware. PCs that use nVidia's SLI or ATI's Crossfire technology, where two graphics cards are used in tandem to boost performance, can easily shoulder the most graphically intense games. The Titan X1900 is equipped with one Radeon X1900XTX, ATI's newest graphics card. We were intrigued to see if it could keep up.

As expected, it breezed through our Doom 3 test, even at ultra-high quality settings. It blasted its way through our Call of Duty 2 benchmark with the best frame rate we've seen. The Titan can easily keep up with SLI GeForce 7800 GT-based systems.

Most games currently available won't be able to take advantage of the Titan's dual-core Athlon X2 4600+ processor, but this should change with newer releases. If you use your PC for other tasks that benefit from the extra processor core, such as video editing, the speed boost will be remarkable. Although it's not as powerful as AMD's latest FX60 processor, the 4600+ is great value, neatly balancing power against cost.

Mesh hasn't forgotten the sound. Eight-channel surround sound is supported, thanks to the full-bodied and powerful Creative T7900 speakers and X-Fi sound card. The X-Fi also supports EAX processing so games that can take advantage of this, such as Doom 3, will sound even more atmospheric.

The ViewSonic 19" flat-panel monitor is bright and sharp with vibrant colours and smooth



greyscale transitions, but the base is stiff and not easily adjustable. Its native resolution of 1,280x1,024 is a disappointment, though, as the X1900XTX card can cope with high-detail setting at 1,600x1,200. A 20" LCD would have been better suited to this system.

The Titan has two empty 3½" drive bays, although you probably won't need to use them; the 400GB hard disk should be more than sufficient for most users. A spare PCI slot and PCI-E x1 slot provide room for extras such as a TV tuner or FireWire card.

Copying discs is made easier by the two optical drives, though the Sony DW-Q28A DVD writer can write to two-layer discs at only 4X, so it's a little behind the times (see our *Labs* on page 99). There aren't any FireWire ports, either, which is odd for a PC at this price.

The Titan X1900 is a powerful PC equipped with quality components that should keep both gamers and non-gamers satisfied. It isn't cheap, but its mix of power, features and expandability make it good value, although we wish it came with a 20" LCD.

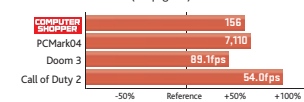
Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Fast 3D and Windows performance
- ✓ Excellent sound system
- ✗ 19" LCD

DESKTOP PC AMD Athlon 64 X2 4600+, 1GB RAM, 400GB hard disk, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, DVD-ROM, 512MB ATI Radeon X1900XTX, 19" LCD
SUPPLIER Mesh Computers 08700 464747
DETAILS www.meshcomputers.com

PERFORMANCE (see page 60)



Also consider...

CARRERA Octan CS-02

★★★★★
£809 inc VAT



Carrera's Octan CS-02 has a powerful dual-core Athlon 64 X2 3800+ processor, which helped it to a particularly good score in our video-encoding test. Its overall score was pretty good, too, so this PC should cope with any application you want to use. It's helped along by a generous 1GB of RAM.

Graphics are supplied by an ATI Radeon X800GT graphics card, which powered Doom 3 to a respectable frame rate. It will happily cope with today's games. The 17" Sony LCD is easy to adjust, but its backlight was slightly uneven and white areas of the screen were not totally pure. It's also supplied with Creative Inspire P5800 surround-sound speakers.



A 250GB hard disk is standard for the price and offers plenty of room for your pictures, music, videos and applications. The Octan CS-02 is a powerful computer at a good price.

DESKTOP PC AMD Athlon 64 X2 3800+, 1GB RAM, 250GB hard disk, 256MB ATI Radeon X800GT, DVD+/-RW DL, 17" LCD SUPPLIER Watford Electronics 08716 661616 DETAILS www.savastore.com ✓ Very fast in Windows, large hard disk ✗ No FireWire ports FULL REVIEW Mar 2006

GLADIATOR

Retarius Extreme GTX

★★★★★

£1,217 inc VAT

Most powerful PCs equipped with the latest dual-core processors and blisteringly fast graphics cards are distractingly loud, as huge cooling fans work overtime to prevent the system overheating. The Retarius Extreme GTX base system promises to break this trend and provide great performance without the racket.

PCs such as Dell's Dimension 5150c (see page 10) become much louder when straining to complete strenuous tasks such as video encoding. The Retarius had no such problem. It isn't completely silent, but we had to press our ears against its sleek black Antec Sonata case to hear anything. Its fans are silent and its insulation dampens the sound of internal components such as hard disks.

The Retarius also delivers great performance. It is equipped with an overclocked dual-core AMD Opteron processor (2.3GHz from the standard 1.8GHz), which is usually found in servers or high-end workstations. It tore through our video-encoding test and made short work of our image-editing and multi-tasking benchmarks. The Retarius should have no trouble handling whatever you throw at it.

This PC's 3D performance is equally impressive. The 256MB nVidia GeForce 7800 GTX graphics card is a great performer, so we weren't surprised that it steamed its way through our Doom 3 and Call of Duty 2 tests. It wasn't quite as fast as the Radeon X1900XTX system from Mesh (opposite), but it wasn't far behind, especially in our strenuous Call of Duty 2 benchmark test.

For even better 3D performance in the future, you can add another graphics card, since the Retarius is



SLI-capable. However, the existing 7800 graphics card is fitted with a special fan, so be careful: unless you add another equally quiet card, you could compromise the PC's blissful silence.

Storage is well catered for by two 250GB hard disks in a RAID 0 array. This gives 500GB of fast storage, but if either drive should fail you'll lose all your data.

Fortunately, the two-layer DVD writer gives you a way of making backups. There are three PCI slots but one is already blocked off by the riser for the USB2 and serial ports, and the others would be rendered useless if you added another graphics card.

The Retarius system has no monitor, keyboard or mouse; it is ideally suited for people keeping their existing peripherals and replacing their base unit. While complete systems with comparable or better performance are available for just £200 more, they won't be as quiet. If you want top-notch performance without the noise and you already have all the peripherals you need, the Retarius Extreme GTX is an excellent choice.

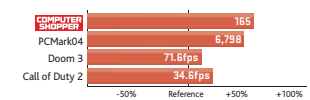
Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Great Windows and 3D performance
- ✓ Very quiet
- ✗ Expensive

DESKTOP PC Overclocked 2.3GHz AMD Opteron 165 processor, 2GB RAM, 2x 250GB hard disks, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 256MB Asus GeForce Extreme N7800 GTX graphics
 SUPPLIER Gladiator Computers 08456 444 666
 DETAILS www.gladiatorcomputers.com

PERFORMANCE (see page 60)



BYTE SIZE

IMATION
4GB Flash Drive

★★★★★

£218 inc VAT



We saw our first 4GB flash drive from Peak in last month's *Shopper*. This month, we've got Imation's drive. This is a much better-designed memory stick. Its protective cap swivels out of the way, so there's no danger of losing it, and it should fit into most USB2 ports without an extension cable.

This flash drive is also fast. Its 26MB/s read speed and 22MB/s write speed copying a 1GB file made it one of the fastest drives we've reviewed. The supplied software lets you create password-protected partitions on the drive for storing sensitive documents.

It costs £50 more than Peak's 4GB Flash Drive, but if performance and style are important, it's a good choice.

David Ludlow

SUPPLIER www.zomp.net
 DETAILS www.imation.co.uk

COOLER MASTER
Susurro

★★★★★

£19 inc VAT



Keeping a processor cool is one thing, but doing it quietly is quite another. Cooler Master's 16dB-rated Susurro aims to do just that. When we plugged it in, we couldn't hear it moving at all. With the fan control turned on in the BIOS the Susurro would often turn itself off, making for totally silent operation, as the large copper heat sink provided enough cooling by itself.

Quiet coolers usually support only low-powered processors, but the Susurro supports all AMD Athlon 64s, including X2s. Running Call of Duty 2 the Susurro kept the processor a good 10° lower than our reference cooler.

The Susurro is well-priced and extremely quiet, making it an excellent buy.

David Ludlow

SUPPLIER www.scan.co.uk
 DETAILS www.coolermaster.com

PC NEXTDAY
Zoostorm 3-4301
Versatile PC

★★★★★

£600 inc VAT



Although it's a budget PC, PC Nextday's Zoostorm 3-4301 managed some respectable scores in our benchmarks. With its 128MB GeForce 6600GT, it notched up a playable frame rate in our Doom 3 test, while the 3GHz Pentium 4 processor and 512MB of RAM made sure that it did well in our application tests, particularly the video encoding.

PC Nextday supplied this PC with an SLI motherboard, so you can easily add a second 6600GT at a later date and improve your graphics performance. This is quite a cheap upgrade to make. However, upgrading the memory is more problematic, as both of



the memory slots are full. While this dual-channel configuration increases performance, it means that you'll have to throw the existing memory away if you upgrade.

That said, the Zoostorm 3-4301 performs well in Windows and as a games machine, all for a very reasonable price.

DESKTOP PC 3GHz Intel Pentium 4 531, 512MB RAM, 160GB hard disk, 128MB nVidia GeForce 6600GT, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 17" LCD
 SUPPLIER PCNextday sales@pcnextday.co.uk DETAILS www.pcnextday.co.uk ✓ Excellent 2D and 3D performance, can add a second graphics card
 ✗ No free RAM slots

BYTE SIZE

TRENDNET TEW-429UB

★★★★★
£38 inc VAT



As well as being a USB wireless adaptor, TRENDnet's TEW-429UB is also a wireless network finder. The adaptor charges when plugged into a USB port and, when unplugged, pressing the scan button makes it search for hotspots.

The LCD shows the name of the network, its operating channel, signal strength and which kind of encryption it uses, if any. There are also three search modes: S mode lists the available networks in order of signal strength, F mode lists all unencrypted networks and D mode locks on to a single network so you can find the location with the best signal strength.

The TEW-429UB does the same job as ZyXel's AG-225H, which we reviewed in *Shopper* February 2006, but it is £15 cheaper.

Chris Finnamore

SUPPLIER www.pixmania.co.uk
DETAILS www.trendnet.com

PORT DESIGNS Seattle

★★★★★
£29 inc VAT



Port Designs' Seattle is described as chic and trendy and it certainly looks different from most notebook bags. The front flap has a pocket for a magazine and a pouch for your sandwiches. Inside there are three more pouches, one of which has a hole for your MP3 player's headphone cable. The main body of the bag has a 17" notebook compartment and a large second compartment.

The bag is light, but we feel this is at the expense of protection for your notebook. There is some padding at the rear of the bag, but hardly any at the front. The Seattle is better suited to occasional travelling than serious use, but it is great value.

Chris Finnamore

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.portdesigns.co.uk

CHOOSING A... PC System

Follow the steps to find your ideal specs

PROCESSOR: Athlon 64 3200+
MEMORY: 512MB DDR
HARD DISK: 160GB
STORAGE: 52X CD-RW/16X DVD combo drive
SOUND: Integrated
SPEAKERS: Stereo
GRAPHICS: Integrated
MONITOR: 17" LCD
EXTRAS: 56K modem
CONNECTORS: 4x USB2, network
SOFTWARE: Windows XP Home Edition
BASICS: Keyboard, mouse
Recommended minimum in grey

1 The minimum specification of PC we recommend, shown in grey above, is a good starting point when working out your ideal system. This PC would cost around £500 and is perfectly capable of running everyday office, multimedia or education software, as well as doing anything on the internet. But it's an unexciting PC. It will be able to play DVD movies, but they won't sound too impressive and modern games are a total no-no.

2 If you're interested in editing your own movies, you'll want a DVD rewriter. Make sure that you get one that supports both +R and -R formats. It's also worth getting one that will write two-layer discs, as this lets you squeeze twice as much information on a disc. There's not much difference in price between the different drive speeds, so we recommend getting one that can write DVD+R and -R at 16X and DVD+R DL at 8X.

If you'll be doing a lot of video projects and disc writing, upgrade to a 250GB hard disk as a minimum.

3 Interested in games? Then upgrade to 1GB of memory and a 200GB disk and get a decent graphics card. Budget cards based on the GeForce FX 6600 graphics processor or Radeon X700 will cope with this year's games, but to play next year's just as smoothly (and enjoy gorgeous graphics today), you'll want anything up to a GeForce FX 7800GTX or Radeon X1900XTX. You'll also need a faster processor.

4 Which faster processor? Faster AMD processors such as the Athlon 64 3400+ are good value. An Athlon 64 X2-based system will cost at least £100 more but runs multiple tasks faster. The alternative is a PC based on Intel's Pentium 4 processor. These are also pricier, but many people feel reassured by the Intel brand, and the fastest P4s always do well in our performance tests.

5 If you're really not interested in games you can definitely live with integrated or cheap graphics, but there are plenty more reasons to upgrade the memory, hard disk or processor.

If you'll be using your PC for serious DTP, music or photo editing tasks, you need the same kind of processor, memory and disk space as for games. For video editing, consider getting two hard disks, perhaps in a RAID array.

6 A quality sound system will enhance all manner of PC activities. To hear the surround soundtrack of a DVD at its best, you'll need a quality 5.1 speaker system. Games can also use such a system to throw sound effects around you. If you're interested in neither games nor DVDs (or don't want to trail wires all around the room), go for a quality stereo pair with a subwoofer to boost the bass instead.

If you're interested in music or want better-quality sound, you'll need to invest in a dedicated sound card. As well as providing enhanced sound, such as Environmental Audio eXtension (EAX), which tweaks the acoustics to make sound appear to be playing in different environments, you'll get higher-quality outputs and more inputs.

7 Although 17" LCD screens save on desk space and look stylish, the limited display size means some may find onscreen text hard to read. A 19" LCD will cost around £50 more, has the same resolution (1,280x1,024) and is easier on the eye. It's better for those who want to edit large photos, documents or spreadsheets, run two applications side by side, or just look important. Twenty-inch LCDs are available from £400 and have a higher resolution (1,600x1,200).

8 The standard set of connectors can be usefully improved with extra USB2 ports, to which most run-of-the-mill PC gadgets attach, and a FireWire port, for fancy gadgets including digital video (DV) cameras.

9 Windows XP Home Edition is preinstalled on most new PCs. Any extra software bundled should be assessed critically. It may be that you'll never actually use it. But equally, you may happen across a PC that includes software you'd otherwise have paid for, in which case you'll almost certainly save lots of money by having it preloaded, though you won't get technical support included.

10 Money left over? A TV card will let you watch television on your PC screen and record programmes to your hard disk, or capture analogue video from a camcorder. Rather than splashing out on an extended warranty, pay extra to get the make of PC your friends or colleagues swear by.

